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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Security Council
Fifty-eighth year

Identical letters dated 9 October 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I wish to draw your attention to the latest violations of the Blue Line from Lebanese territory that have gravely endangered the security of civilian life along Israel's northern border, and threatened international peace and security.

On the evening of Monday, 6 October 2003, Hizbollah terrorists perpetrated a fatal sniper shooting from Lebanon across the Blue Line, killing an IDF soldier near the Israeli town of Metulla. The victim, David Solomonov, age 21, was on routine patrol when terrorists opened heavy fire, without provocation, at his position.

In a separate incident later on Monday night, Hizbollah terrorists fired missiles, rockets and small arms at positions on the Israeli side of the Blue Line in the eastern sector. The unprovoked cross-border attack lasted into the early morning hours of Tuesday, 7 October. Dozens of salvos and shells landed in the vicinity of residential villages. Five mortar shells also landed west of the Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona.

The inaction and complicity of the Government of Lebanon, and regimes such as Syria and Iran, have enabled the terrorist organization Hizbollah to move and operate freely in the area of South Lebanon and launch such willful attacks against Israel. Monday's attack is only the most recent in a series of unprovoked cross-border attacks perpetrated by Hizbollah. Since Israel's complete withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, in full and confirmed compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), these attacks have aimed to terrorize civilian populations in northern Israel, and provoke an escalation of hostilities along the Blue Line. Since Israeli withdrawal, Hizbollah terrorists have killed 15 Israeli citizens and wounded 60 others in over 100 separate incidents of anti-aircraft fire, and more than 60 separate incidents involving katyusha rockets, mortar shells, anti-tank missiles and small arms fire.

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Hizbollah, a vicious terrorist network that supports exporting suicide terrorism against Western targets, has demonstrated only unlawful violence and wanton disregard for innocent life in the region. Monday's incident follows a virulent statement delivered by the leader of Hizbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut on 17 September 2003, in which he called on all States to participate in the fight against Israel by "hitting the Israelis internally". Nasrallah added that the path of resistance is the "correct and fruit-bearing path". The support and inaction of Lebanon in this regard is not only immoral, it is a direct and grave violation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and established principles of international law, which call upon all States to refrain from providing any support, whether active or passive , to all persons or entities involved in terrorist acts, and to ensure that their territory is not used as a base for cross-border attacks.

The Government of Lebanon, in blatant disregard for the integrity of the Blue Line and the stability of the region, effectively relinquished control of South Lebanon to Hizbollah, in failing to deploy its forces in the area. Such inaction is in direct negation of its obligations under the norms of international law and the provisions of resolutions 425 (1978), 426 (1978), 1310 (2000), 1337 (2001) and 1373 (2001), which call for the restoration of international peace and security, the return of the effective authority and presence of the Government of Lebanon in the south, and the prevention of cross-border attacks from a State's territory. Lebanon, and its Government in Beirut, cannot be absolved of its legal obligations to fight terrorism, like any other State, as part of the global campaign against international terrorism.

The Government of Syria, which provides critical financial, logistical and political support to Hizbollah, and provides its leadership and operatives with safe harbour in Syrian territory and in Syrian-occupied Lebanon, also bears responsibility for violations and provocations committed by Hizbollah across the Blue Line, and for the continuing instability in the area. It is a well-known fact that Syria is the main power broker in Lebanon, exercising an overwhelming degree of both political and military control. Hizbollah plays a key role in the Syrian order in Lebanon. Damascus has transformed Hizbollah into Lebanon's chief armed militia — a proxy strategic partner and front-line operational arm in exerting Syrian policy through terrorism in the area.

As such, Damascus has made concerted efforts to preserve the freedom, integrity, and capacity of Hizbollah, and other terrorist organizations, on Lebanese soil. Syria maintains numerous terrorist training facilities in Syrian army bases and in separate facilities, and provides extensive military assistance to Hizbollah by overland transfer of sophisticated arms from Iran through Syrian territory. Syria also maintains the role of state benefactor to regional and global terrorist organizations. Iran funnels and launders huge sums through the Syrian national banking system to terrorist groups with the Syrian Government's complicity. In contrast to recent statements by the Syrian Foreign Minister that suggest that Syria has contributed to the international war against terror, Syria's hold on terrorism is stronger than ever.

Despite the continued and flagrant violations of Security Council resolutions and international law by the Governments of Lebanon and Syria, and the ongoing and violent provocations directed at Israeli soldiers and civilians which emanate from Lebanese territory, Israel has exercised a great deal of restraint, while reserving its right to take steps to defend its citizens.

This week, Israel marked the third anniversary of the abduction of three Israeli soldiers kidnapped on 7 October 2000 by Hizbollah, while they patrolled the Israeli side of the Blue Line. The international community can no longer tolerate the failure of Lebanon to assume effective control over its territory in South Lebanon, and to prevent acts of terrorism in accordance with its obligations under international law and Security Council resolutions. Were Lebanon to assert its ability to prevent its territory from serving as a base for terrorist attacks, as is required of all States, tensions in the South Lebanon area and in the region would be immeasurably defused, rendering Israeli measures of self-defense unnecessary. It is also incumbent upon the international community to make clear to Syria and Iran that their ongoing participation in terrorism is an intolerable affront to international law and the peace and security of civilians everywhere.

The present letter is a follow-up to previous letters concerning the dangerous situation in South Lebanon caused by the illegal attacks perpetrated by Hizbollah across the Blue Line.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter circulated as an official document of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 156 and 37, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Ambassador Dan **Gillerman**
Permanent Representative